

Nothing Lasts Forever

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After being gone for a week, Mr. Krabs returns to Bikini Bottom, and he has some very bad news for his two-man crew. Sequel to "Finite".

Status: complete

Published: 2023-06-14

Updated: 2023-07-06

Words: 16134

Chapters: 4

Rated: Fiction T - Language: English - Genre: Hurt/Comfort/Humor - Characters: SpongeBob, Squidward, Mr. Krabs, The Flying Dutchman - Reviews: 9 - Favs: 10 - Follows: 6

Original source: <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/14244417/1/Nothing-Lasts-Forever>

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One Krabs Mortality

Squidward yawned and stretched his tentacles, before sighing in delight while walking to work...about half an hour past noon.

"Man, I haven't slept this well in ages." He smiled contently. After bidding farewell to his late nemesis, Squidward had an oddly quiet and peaceful week. Not having any grand ambitions and using his two decades' worth of experience in dealing with his co-worker/neighbor really helped. He hadn't felt this rejuvenated in years.

"Hmmm....what cover story should I tell SpongeBoob this time?" he wondered jokingly. "Defective alarm clock? Nah, already used it twice? Broken lock? Nope, used it yesterday? Getting the sniffles? Oh no, I should save that one to give myself the day off tomorrow."

As he finally walked through the front door and into the eating area of the Krusty Krab, he saw that it was already filled with customers; sitting, chatting, and enjoying their meals, and the smell of sizzling patties from the kitchen confirmed that SpongeBob was already there and hard at work. No surprises here.

"Mr. Tentacles, there you are?" SpongeBob peeked through the window, somersaulted into the eating area, and approached him, carrying a platter with half a dozen patties.

"Hello, SpongeBob. I see you're a model employee as usual." Squidward humored him with a bland smile.

"What took you so long, sir? You should have been here five hours ago?" the sponge asked in a worried tone.

"Yeah...um..." a blasé Squidward improvised an answer, "...I found a poor snail stuck in a tree. I just couldn't stand there and watch, so I helped it down, and then...eh...I took it to the vet. Yeah, yeah, to

make sure it was alright, and then I went around and found it a new, loving family... cuz it was a stray."

SpongeBob was awestruck and tears poured from his eye as he clutched his hands. "How noble of you. You are such an inspiration, Mr. Tentacles."

"Guess I am." Squidward shrugged. He could really get used to this "Mr. Tentacles" business. Old Man Krabs had been missing for a week now, that was surely enough to be declared dead by the authorities, right? Not like they could retrieve his remains from some remote mountain slope or uncharted jungle or wherever he went off to.

"Pew. What a relief to hear that you were just doing your civic duties." SpongeBob wiped his forehead after delivering the platter to Fred Sr., Fred Jr., little Freddy, and the rest of their family.

"What do you mean?" Squidward asked idly.

"Nothing... I was just worried that you might have been kidnapped by Plankton. That fiend will never give up trying to steal the Krabby Patty formula." SpongeBob admitted. "But I keep forgetting, he's more into overelaborate theft than kidnapping."

Squidward cocked an eyebrow. "Um... SpongeBob? Plankton's *dead*. You were there when he died days ago. Something about his synthetic body falling apart?"

SpongeBob looked at him with a blank expression for a few seconds, which unnerved the octopus a bit, before erupting with hearty laughter.

"That's a good one, sir!" he shot a finger gun at the octopus. "We should hold another Komedy Krab show, you'd be a riot if you went on stage."

Squidward blinked. He knew SpongeBob was a bit delusional, but the nitwit had personally witnessed Plankton's demise, together with him and Sandy. Such horrific imagery would surely be burned into a person's mind. What was going on here?

"Sponge-"

"Why, Plankton's probably in the Chum Bucket right now!" SpongeBob narrowed his eyes and held his hand above them while eyeing the restaurant across the street, his tone dead serious. Squidward's eyes widened incredulously.

The octopus could clearly see that the Chum Bucket was boarded up and there was a big "closed" sign on it. Did SpongeBob not see that?

"Probably concocting another diabolical scheme to steal Mr. Krabs's legacy! It's never a good sign when he's on the down low for so long, so we must remain on high alert. Mr. Krabs is counting on us!"

"SpongeBob, what are you prattling on about?" Squidward grew irate. "Plankton's dead, deceased, departed, kaput, history, pushing up daisies. Actually... he's not even doing that, because his ashes were scattered across the ocean. You and I saw it. I repeat, we SAW it. We'll never have to worry about him again!"

"I admire your optimism, Mr. Tentacles." SpongeBob nodded to him before walking away toward the kitchen, leaving Squidward utterly dumbfounded. "But we mustn't grow too complacent. It's what Plankton is counting on!"

He looked at Squidward as he grabbed the doorknob and sent him a "watching you" gesture. "So keep your eyes peeled. Remember Mr. Krabs's teachings!"

"*Mr. Krabs?*" Squidward grimaced. Just how on Earth was he going to break the news to the poor, delusional shmuck? By all accounts, Krabs must have finally met his match. Probably whatever creature Squidward had heard roaring on the phone.

Squidward wasn't particularly upset about it, for he and Krabs were acquaintances at best, and the latter had caused him plenty of grief over the years with little compensation, and it also meant that he was now effectively the permanent manager and maybe even owner of the Krusty Krabs.

"OH MY GOSH!?" SpongeBob beamed.

Squidward jolted in surprise as the sponge rushed past him and pressed his face against the glass wall, sporting a big, doofy smile and sparks in his bulging eyes.

"Look, Squidward! Look! Mr. Krabs has finally returned!"

"Say what?" Squidward blurted and joined him. Gazing at the road, he did indeed see his stingy boss staggering toward the restaurant. He was disheveled, his pants were in tatters and he was wearing a white fur coat for some reason.

"I knew I shouldn't have gotten my hopes up..." Squidward droned dejectedly. Nothing good lasted forever, back to the usual business hours it seemed.

A jubilant SpongeBob skipped out and Squidward slowly walked after him to greet their boss.

"MR. K! We've missed you so much!" SpongeBob ran up to him, barely refraining himself from glopping Krabs. The latter just stood there with a dreary and miserable expression.

"Welcome back, sir." Squidward did a halfhearted salute. "I hope your stay in "New Kelp City" has been most enjoyable. The "convention" went on for more than a day, huh?"

"It must have, Squidward." SpongeBob chuckled in agreement. "You must have had a blast, sir! Still wishing you were there, huh, huh?"

"I'm sure he does." Squidward replied flatly.

"You'll be pleased to know that we kept your restaurant in tip-top condition during your longer-than-expected absence! It was such an enlightening experience..." SpongeBob started excitedly, but while he prattled on Squidward noticed that something was off about Krabs.

The old crustacean was completely unresponsive, just standing there with a glazed look and slouching, with his claws dragging on the pavement. And now that Squidward thought about it, Krabs looked even more wrinkly and crusty than usual, and his vibrantly red shell looked a bit pale.

"That's nice, boyo..." Krabs finally spoke, his tone hollow and lethargic.

"Mr. Krabs? You feeling okay?" Squidward inquired. "Not to encroach on your private matters but are you going to molt again? You look a little pale around the gills?"

Krabs sighed and glanced down.

"Huh?" SpongeBob grabbed one of Krabs's arms and inspected it. "You might be right, Squidward?"

"Don't worry, Mr. Krabs. It's nothing to be embarrassed about." He assured Krabs before whispering, "But let's get you inside your office quick, there are children out here."

"Laddie, I ain't moltin'..." Krabs's lip trembled. "I ain't ever moltin' again."

Squidward's brow furrowed while SpongeBob was puzzled but naturally drew the most optimistic conclusion from that bleak response.

"Oh, so they invented a cream that stops molting?"

"Meet me in me office, be quick 'bout it..." Krabs said gravelly, a tinge of urgency entering his tone, and staggered into the Krusty Krab, making creaking noises with each step.

Squidward eyed his every move with a pensive expression.

"Uhhh....isn't this great, Squidward!" SpongeBob was breathing rapidly with excitement. "Mr. Krabs has another important announcement to make!"

"Yeah...I guess?" was all Squidward could say. Something didn't seem right, but he supposed they would learn soon enough.

Half an hour later, Squidward and SpongeBob entered Mr. Krabs's office and found their boss sitting at his desk as usual.

But Krabs wasn't looking at them, he had his face buried in his claws and didn't even seem to notice them. Exchanging glances, the two took their usual seats in front of Krabs and waited for him to say something. But he didn't.

"Um...Mr. Krabs?" SpongeBob asked, minding his manners. "You wanted to see us?"

Sighing, Krabs straightened himself. Squidward was surprised to see that his eyestalks were bloodshot. He knew Krabs seldom cried...as long as no monetary woes were looming over him. Then he'd turn on the waterworks real quick.

"Boys..." he sniffed. "I don't know how t' break this t' ye? But I..."

Squidward's natural impulse was to make a snarky remark in regard to the banality of his boss's usual announcements, but he didn't. Something about Krabs wasn't right. His brazen and chatty boss was rarely at a loss for words, especially when Krusty Krab business was concerned.

Did he fail to find the treasure he was looking for or whatever he was doing out there? Unlikely, Krabs's previous treasure hunts and hair-brained "get rich quick" schemes often went south but he didn't sulk about them...for more than a few days anyway.

Actually, now that Squidward thought about it, Krabs really wasn't as manly and thick-skinned as he liked to claim he was.

"And he called ME a baby for having a tombstone in commemoration of my hopes and dreams." Squidward scoffed inwardly.

"Say no more, Mr. K." SpongeBob held up a maroon-colored bathrobe. "You can wear this once your shell falls off. We won't think any less of you with your gross pink flesh exposed."

Squidward shuddered at the mental image.

"I told ye tis NOT 'bout me stinkin' shell, SpongeBob." Krabs scowled, raising his voice a bit.

"Oh?" SpongeBob realized before another idea hit him. "Is it time to have our check-ups again?"

"No-"

"Fear not, Mr. Krabs!" SpongeBob cut him off and raised his finger. "We'll keep you safe from those nasty needles, stethoscopes, and old magazines. I'll just call in a favor from Larry to pose as you again-"

"SpongeBob! Tis not it either." Krabs barked. "There ain't no check-ups."

"Maybe if you let him finish, we would know the issue by now. Just a suggestion?" Squidward deadpanned, making SpongeBob shrink and flush.

"Sorry... proceed, Mr. Krabs." The sponge said sheepishly.

Calming down, Krabs saw that he now had their full, undivided attention, and yet he couldn't find his voice. He tried to think of a way to tell them the bad news. He knew SpongeBob would be absolutely devastated, but keeping the poor boy in the dark any longer would only make things worse.

"What are ye sayin'?" he told himself. "He ain't no boy anymore, he's 43 years old. Ye watched 'im grow and...not change at all in what now? In 20 years?"

"I'm afraid there's gonna be some changes here...." He started meekly.

"Changes?" SpongeBob covered his mouth in excitement, shaking in his seat.

Squidward was the exact opposite. "Changes? Like what?" he snarked. "Buying us new hats?"

We get a closeup of Squidward's hat, which is tattered, stained, covered with brown patches, and has bugs and worms crawling out of it.

"No, Mr. Squidward." Was his boss's weak reply. "I think ye two will be takin' on a lot of new responsibilities goin' forward..."

That piqued Squidward's interest a bit. SpongeBob, meanwhile, had a massive grin and was holding onto his chair, still shaking.

"...and I don't think I'll be there t' supervise ye. Ye'll be runnin' the business on yer own."

"You're finally reopening the Krusty Krab II!" SpongeBob jumped on top of his seat and spun it in circles. "Yippee! I'm gonna be a manager-"

"Will ye stop spinnin', ye idiot!" Krabs yelled, making SpongeBob come to a screeching halt, and even Squidward was caught off

guard by the sudden outburst.

SpongeBob sat down and wilted as Krabs glared at them. "Tis has nothin' t' do with that failed business venture from 16 years ago!"

Seeing SpongeBob's fearful look, Krabs calmed down and immediately felt guilty for snapping at him like that. He did not want the lad to remember him like this.

"SpongeBob... I'm sorry I yelled at ye..." he covered his face in shame "...I jus' don't know how t' tell ye boys the terrible news."

"Terrible news?" SpongeBob and Squidward said in unison.

"Yes, very, very terrible news." Krabs nodded.

As Squidward drew a breath to speak, Krabs clarified, "And it has nothin' to do with money, or the Krusty Krab, or ye two. Tis all 'bout me."

A lightbulb went off over SpongeBob's head.

"Now, I get it." he smiled once more. "You're not feeling young again?"

Krabs facepalmed. Well, the little chucklehead was halfway right.

"Say no more! I have the perfect remedy for it!" SpongeBob assured him. "Me and Patrick will take you out for another wild night! And we won't panty raid anyone, least of all your mother."

"Ye can't panty raid someone who isn't with us no more." Krabs thought sadly, and he doubted he and his old lady would be reunited.

"It's not that either." He added, making SpongeBob's face drop.

Money? The Krusty Krab? His employees? Molting? Failed attempts to expand the KK brand? Check-ups? Mid-life crisis? If none of those

were bothering Mr. Krabs, then what in Neptune's name could? Squidward was out of ideas.

He knew Plankton couldn't be the issue either, so what was it? For the first time in his last 20 or so years of servitude in this dingy place, the cephalopod was actually unable to read his super-predictable boss like an open book.

Was this actually... serious?

"SpongeBob. Squidward." Krabs glanced at his desk with a forlorn look. "I'm afraid me days are numbered."

Squidward's eyes widened in shock while SpongeBob looked confused.

"Mr. Krabs? You're not seriously thinking about... *retiring* ?!" the sponge gasped. "You have so many more years ahead of you!"

"I've lived a lot of years." Krabs quipped sardonically. "More than most sea folk...far more. But I think me time has finally run out."

Squidward was taken aback. Could it be true? It seemed unfathomable. As much as he'd been entertaining the idea this week, part of him kept telling him that it was impossible.

SpongeBob just sat there, silent and unresponsive. Observing him, Squidward wondered if the simpleton finally got the memo? If so, Squidward dreaded not having an umbrella with him.

"Mr. Krabs... there is no shame in being old." The sponge gave an awkward smile. "Why, age brings a lot of benefits...like...eh, wisdom...and eh...amazing shuffle-boarding prowess?"

"SpongeBob, me boy..." Krabs shook his head, almost taking amusement in his employee's boundless naivete. "I've grown old a long time ago, but I ain't gonna grow even older."

"What...what do ya mean by that?" SpongeBob asked in a shaky voice, his mind struggling to block out the obvious implication his boss's words carried.

Squidward didn't have that problem. And for all his cynicism and apathy towards the world, even he didn't treat this concept lightly.

"Mr. Krabs..." he asked tentatively "...are you trying to tell us that you're....that you're..."

They were suddenly assaulted by indoor lightning, making the trio flinch. All lights went out in the room and sickly green mist started appearing all around them, accompanied by a foghorn sound.

They were greeted by a familiar pirate laugh as the mist started morphing into a towering figure, who lifted his arms up and laughed diabolically, accompanied by more lightning, making the Krusty Crew cower in fear.

"Holy shrimp! It's the horrible Flying Dutchman!" SpongeBob cried in mind-numbing terror as the green ghost loomed over him, Squidward, and Krabs.

"Cut the drama, *SpongeBob* ." The Flying Dutchman leaned down towards him. "We know each other."

He then went right back to being dramatic as he resumed hollering with maniacal laughter.

"Eugene Krabs!" he pointed his crooked finger at the trembling crustacean. "Yer time has FINALLY come!"

"I'm not Eugene Krabs!" Krabs shook his head frantically, sweating bullets. "I'm Flower Harold...eh...I mean Harold-"

The Flying Dutchman's booming laugh cut him off, before the former put his hands on his hips, smirking with glee. "Ye though ye could evade me forever, did ye?"

So this will be my final entry in what I guess is a trilogy now, following " Some Things Never Change" and " Finite" , now focusing on and concluding a story thread that's been in the background in the first two stories, and you can pretty much guess what's in store for ol'Krabs.

Oh, and don't you dare tell me "But this contradicts this and that episode". SpongeBob is a show that has been going on for two decades now, and even with me diverging from "canon" in 2020 (this takes place a week after " Some Things Never Change" , written in 2020), it's still like 400 episodes to consider and I ain't gonna try to rationalize all of them within the context of one continuity, especially since the show itself has constantly been contradicting itself ever since the Hillenburg era. For the sake of this story and my other SpongeBob fics, I've been using *selective continuity* , a.k.a. doing what I think serves the story/joke well (like continuity references) and ignoring what doesn't XD

The Life and Times of Eugene Krabs

"Ye thought ye could evade me forever, did ye?"

Loud banging on the office door interrupted the Flying Dutchman's dramatic entrance, much to his chagrin as he fumed with green fire.

"Hey, where's our food? We've been waiting like forever!" Norm yelled while knocking on the door, surrounded by the other enraged customers, when the Flying Dutchman busted out, making them all shriek in terror.

"BEGONE, MEDDLING MORTALS!" he roared furiously, his eyes glowing and pupilless and his voice reverberating. "THE FLYING DUTCHMAN'S DOIN' BUSINESS HERE!"

Like headless chickens, the screaming customers ran out of the Krusty Krabs, while the Flying Dutchman calmly returned to the Krusty Crew.

"Where was I? Oh, yes!" the ghost pirate pointed at the trembling Krabs again. "Ye were are persistent one, I'll give ye that much! But no mere mortal can escape the Flying Dutchman fer all eternity!"

"Squidward?" SpongeBob exchanged glances with his terrified co-worker. "I don't understand what's going on?"

"That's new." The octopus rolled his eyes, despite everything. Though he couldn't pretend like he was any more privy to this peculiar situation.

"Please, jus' give me a little more time!" Krabs pressed his claws together in a pleading gesture. "I...I didn't even have the chance t' explain things t' me crew."

The Flying Dutchman grabbed him by his shirt and hoisted him up. "Didn't have the chance?" he barked a curt laugh. "Ye had *decades* t'

fess up!"

"Excuse me, Mr. Flying Dutchman?" SpongeBob timidly raised his hand, diverting the ghost's attention. "Pardon my intrusion, but what do you want with Mr. Krabs? Where are you taking him?"

"I'm takin' 'im t' the same place I take all the sinful swabs of the seven seas!" The Flying Dutchman declared, aided by more indoor lightning. "TO DAVY JONES'S LOCKER!"

"Davy Jones's locker?!" SpongeBob blurted in horror. "But why? You can't be serious! He's a good man!"

"Oh, for the love of..." an exasperated Squidward clamped his tentacle over SpongeBob's mouth.

"Can I ask a real question?" the octopus inquired. "I know your line of work and all, but what's all this talk of, "Ye thought ye could evade me forever"? SpongeBob and I are kinda locked out of the loop here."

The Flying Dutchman glared at them for a bit before perking up. "I'm sure ye wage slaves are. Yer skinflint of a boss WAS a very private man."

"Mr. Krabs, what does he mean by that? Did you hide something from us?" SpongeBob asked, making Krabs deflate in defeat.

"Yeah, you're usually an open book?" Squidward added with a blasé look.

"I...I don't know how t' explain this." A flustered Krabs rubbed his arm, prompting another hearty laugh from the Flying Dutchman.

"I certainly know how!" He told the puny mortals. "This unscrupulous bottom-feeder has made it an annual tradition t' cheat me of his soul, and this has been goin' on fer the last *three centuries*!"

"What....you mean 300 years?" Squidward jerked back in surprise.
"How is that even...I know Krabs is ancient but..."

"How is it possible?" The Flying Dutchman laughed. "It isn't...usually. Unless ye know the whereabouts of a certain little spring called....the Fountain of Youth!"

"Oh...so that's what "fast food congress" was code for." Squidward shrugged. He'd seen plenty of crazier things than that in his time.

"You're 300 years old?!" SpongeBob blurted incredulously, before adding, "I thought you were half that age at most?"

Krabs offered his fry cook a pitiful look. He had never imagined this day would come, but here it was, and Krabs was going out on a whimper like the feeble old man he never wanted to become.

"I'm even older than that." Krabs said weakly. "When I told ye I was in business fer a long time, I meant a very, very long time, thanks t' me...eh...secret anti-agin' remedy. I've been wanderin' the ocean floor and makin' money fer nearly 400 hundred years."

SpongeBob couldn't believe his earholes and even Squidward was taken aback. But then...upon further reflection, this actually answered a LOT about Mr. Krabs.

The Flying Dutchman chuckled with wicked delight. "Aye. And ain't it poetic that a corporate scumbag such as yerself would do himself in by sappin' his own source of lifeblood bone-dry, due t' his unquenchable greed?"

He snapped his head back laughing and slapped his nonexistent knee as a rimshot sound was heard. "Get it? *Unquenchable* greed?"

SpongeBob and Squidward just exchanged awkward glances.

"Hey, c'mon. I thought "sustainable harvestin'" was jus' a fad endorsed by anti-capitalist hippies?" Krabs shrugged bashfully. "I've

seen many of those come and go, especially with me daughter."

"Mr. Krabs? Is this all true?" the dumbfounded SpongeBob asked again. "It can't be true. No!"

Squidward glared at him and gestured as their ghostly visitor. "Are you for real? The literal embodiment of death itself told us just that, and Krabs admitted it. What other testimony do you need?"

SpongeBob's eyes twitched and he fidgeted. "Yes...I mean...I just... I..."

"It is true, boys...all of it." Krabs nodded sadly. "Ye probably wondered why I had such a limitless supply of excitin' tales t' recite at any moment?"

"I thought you just made them all up?" was Squidward's frank response, earning a cross look from the old crab.

"I didn't, all of 'em are true!" Krabs said indignantly. He might have been a fraud in countless ways, but he was no bloody spinner of yarns!

"Me long life was an eventful one. See, I first made a name fer myself durin' the golden age of piracy. I always loved sailin', and in those days, the corsair business was the most profitable one for aspirin' sailors-

"Did I give ye permission fer a farewell speech?" the Flying Dutchman probed, making Krabs hold his breath and sweat, before guffawing.

"Go on..." the ghost pirate gave an approving nod "...I loves me a good story."

"Is Eugene Krabs even your real name?" Squidward cocked an eyebrow, while SpongeBob gawked at him before nibbling on his fingernails, unwilling to even entertain that horrible notion.

Krabs scowled. "Yes, it IS me birth name, but in me salad days, most knew me as "Thrifty Jack", includin' me ol' crew."

"Bet ye life-lubbers will never guess how he acquired that nickname?" The Flying Dutchman joked.

"Dunno?" SpongeBob scratched his head. "What does "thrifty" mean? I'm a little rusty on my sailor lingo?"

The Flying Dutchman's face fell while Krabs cleared his throat.

"Anyway, those were the days..." he said with some nostalgia. "A time when a man could set out and make his fortune through blood, sweat, and tears...and some...eh...burrowin'."

"You mean plunder and pillage?" Squidward deadpanned. And he wasn't compelled to ask whether Krabs meant "blood, sweat, and tears" in the metaphorical sense.

"Alright... if ye want t' get *technical* ." Krabs grumbled.

"Wait, you mean pirates *steal things* ?" SpongeBob went agape. "I thought they are simply treasure-hunting adventures with a love for rum and shanties."

"Yeah...well..." Krabs tugged on his collar "...things were a wee bit differed back then..."

We flash back to a pirate ship cruising the vast blue brines. Decked out in a pirate coat and tricorn hat, Krabs was dancing in the middle of a sea shanty, surrounded by various gnarly-looking sea creatures who cheered him on, some climbing the mast and one playing the accordion and another the flute.

" We was the best in the business. Real, red-blooded men." Krabs stated as his old self and crew were making their getaway on a rowboat stacked with gold, jewelry, and other valuables, while a burning ship filled with screaming occupants sank in the background.

"As someone who valued hard work, I always compensated me men fer their efforts." Krabs claimed as his past self and crew were shoving a huge treasure chest into the captain's quarters. After getting it in, his first mate, a gaunt swordfish with a crooked nose and stitched-up scar on his forehead held up his fin, eagerly expecting his payment, as did many others.

"Somehow, I doubt that." Squidward snarked as the past Krabs let out his trademark laugh and flipped a single gold doubloon into his first mate's fin.

"There ye go, ye boys can split it between ye." he absentmindedly told his glowering crew before shutting the door. "Now leave me and me booty alone!"

Romantic music started playing and the disgruntled crew grew queasy looks and backed away as they heard their captain purring, "Hello there, gorgeous..."

"I always made sure t' keep me vessel, the Jolly Miser, in tip-top shape..." Krabs said as we see his miserable first mate trying to operate a taped-up steering wheel and breaking it off.

"I spared no expenses with our loot...but only fer what I deemed truly necessary." he continued as we cut to a mainsail made up of sown-together bedsheets and two thuggish sea stars patching up holes in it with one-piece pajamas, while inside the lower deck, a sweaty killer whale is chewing on lots of black bubble gum and desperately trying to plug up all the leaking holes.

"And it had t' be lickerish-flavored." He told the audience in disgust before resuming his duty.

"Me crew were tough and didn't need much besides the essentials..." We see a huge wine barrel on the deck, only to zoom out to reveal that it's actually a tiny one standing on a wooden table.

A buff shrimp with perma-stubbles drew the tiny faucet and a small drop of whisky fell into his shot glass, while next to him, a portly anglerfish with an eye patch and a goblin shark sat on a bench and glared at their lunch; driftwood on platters, with squashed urchins as side dishes.

"Really, sometimes I worried that I was spoilin' 'em with me generosity..." Krabs insisted as we see a long line of pirates doing the pee-pee dance in front of an outhouse.

"Come on, matey! What's the holdup!" a barracuda with a head scarf was banging on the door. They heard flushing, and the goblin shark pirate backed out as dirty water poured out of the toilet and spread across the deck.

*"The toilet be clogged up, and the captain refused t' by a *dolphin chirp* plunger at the last harbor! AGAIN!?" the shark ranted in annoyance.*

"And I always supplied 'em with the best weaponry..." the first mate cringed in horror as his captain was digging up a grave and offered him a swordfish skull, all while sporting a blissful smile. They were surrounded by a bunch of other defiled graves.

"But me crew never did agree with me frugal ways."

Krabs and his first mate rowed back to their ship with a stolen chest and helped haul it up with ropes, before a rope ladder came down and Krabs climbed up. His first mate tried following him but Krabs stopped him.

"Oh, no." Krabs said sternly and offered him an old-fashion diving suit. "Go back t' where that ship sank and retrieve all me cannonballs! I ain't payin' fer new ones when those are still perfectly usable."

The swordfish seethed and grit his teeth but obliged. "Unfortunately, I didn't pick up on their growin' dissatisfaction in time..."

We cut to Krabs and his first mate holding onto the stern as their ship seemed to be moving at high speed.

" I told ye we needed the sea monster repellant!" the latter yelled at Krabs.

" Nay!" the captain argued. "It be a one-in-a-million chance encounter! And those cans cost a small fortune!"

We zoom out to see the ship speeding through the Arctic Ocean and being chased by a tentacled, stop-motion behemoth, the Abominable Snow Mollusk.

"So lemme guess..." Squidward said blandly "...they resorted to mutiny?"

"Oh, no." SpongeBob shuddered with dread. "They wouldn't. Would they?"

"Aye, they did." Krabs nodded before clenching his fist. "Backstabbin' ingrates they were..."

We see Krabs exhaling in delight, naked and with his chest hair showing, as he was bathing in his ill-gotten riches which filled his room from wall to wall. Suddenly, the door was kicked open and he was engulfed by shadows, forcing him to cover himself with a towel.

" Hey, hey! What be the big idea!" he demanded to know as the shadows came closer.

" They stripped me of me title...and everythin' else..." we cut to an embarrassed Krabs, wearing nothing but a barrel, being forced to walk the plank, his mutinous crew cheering behind him and his former first mate, now wearing the captain's hat and coat, gleefully pushing him onward by pocking his sword (a proper one) into Krabs' back, forcing him to pinch his crooked nose and jump off.

"So you were lost at sea with not even the clothes on your back?"
SpongeBob covered his mouth, enthralled by Krabs's tales as usual.
"How did you make it out alive?"

"Aye, I was in quite a pickle." Krabs admitted before raising his pincher. "But bein' the hardy seaman I was, I wasn't 'bout t' let a little brine do me in, so I bravely faced the ocean's wrath!"

" Help! HELP!? Someone help me!? Oh, Neptune spare me!?" the past Krabs wailed and waived his arms pathetically while floating inside his barrel in the middle of nowhere.

" I don't want t' die! I don't want t' die!" his eyestalks bent back and sputtered hot tears, when a lifebuoy was thrown his way and he looked up to see a large ship in front of him , and the captain smiling and waving at him, wearing a very distinct wardrobe.

" Fortunately, I persevered long enough t' be picked up by a passin' conquistador ship."

"Conquistadors?" Squidward asked before connecting the dots. "Oh, I see where this is going."

" The ship was helmed by one Captain Julio Pez de León..." Krabs explained as his past self was offered conquistador clothes by the friendly and blissfully oblivious captain, while some of his men eyed a wanted poster on the wall warily "...and despite me...eh... controversial reputation, I tricked 'im and his men into thinkin' that I was jus' some poor shmoe that got robbed by pirates."

" Capitán, doesn't he look like that infamous pirate?" one of them pointed at Krabs, who started sweating nervously.

" Of course not... I'm jus' little ol' Eugene." His pupils darted left and right before getting an idea and sending the fish an accusatory look. "Do all crabs look the same t' ye fish folk, huh, huh?"

The crewman shrank with shame and his captain wagged his finger at him disapprovingly before smiling at Krabs and showing him a rolled-up map. "The captain was a seasoned explorer and had discovered a long-forgotten route allegedly leadin' t' the fabled Fountain of Youth!"

" I thought that was pure claptrap, a tall tale kept alive by the fool-hearted." Krabs explained as his past self gave his savior a skeptical look but he thought it over. "But I knew any long-lost map had t' lead t' somethin' of value, and since I was short on cash at the moment, I offered t' be their guide, since I knew the south Pacific like the back of me claw."

" I see your habit of exploiting naïve and overly trusting shmucks goes way back." Squidward deadpanned as the ship headed towards tropical waters.

" It was a perilous journey and it lasted fer years, most of the crew didn't make it. Quicksand, whirlpools, cyclones, yeti crabs...nature be a cruel mistress." Krabs continued as we see him, disheveled, tattered, and sporting perma-stubbles, cutting away coral branches with a sword and barreling onward, with an equally disheveled Julio following him, hugging himself and looking like he was on the verge of fainting.

" But we eventually found it." Krabs helped him along and then cut some more vegetation blocking their path, and the duo was suddenly faced with a blinding light. The two shielded their eyes before adjusting them and smiling with joy and doing a happy dance together.

"So I take it you and him became the bestest of friends?"
SpongeBob presumed, causing Krabs to tug his collar again.

"Um...not exactly."

Krabs and Julio were shaking hands, with Krabs holding the map. The latter started talking and making grand gestures for emphasis.

"Though our quest was a success, we were soon faced with a conflict of interests."

Krabs scowled and rubbed his chin. "See, he wanted t' share this miracle with the rest of the world, while I...eh...was a bit more hesitant."

" You're right, me friend. It would be most selfish t' hoard all this immortality juice fer ourselves." Krabs nodded before suddenly pointing up. "Hey, look at that majestic eagle ray!"

" Dios mio! Where!" Julio looked up with his spyglass before getting pushed off a cliff by Krabs.

" So inevitably, we had a fallout." Krabs remained nonchalant as his ex-partner's scream grew fainter and fainter until it was cut off by a splat sound.

We zoom in on Krabs, as he's clutching the map and wringing his claws while chuckling evilly. "Acquirin' ownership of the map, I was determined t' recoup me lost booty."

" I started scourin' the globe..." we see a dirt-covered Krabs, wearing new pirate clothes, opening a chest and beaming with joy as he was illuminated by a golden glow.

"... and through sheer grit and determination, I accomplished that on me own, a self-made crab..." Krabs stated as his old self was shoving his newest batch of gold coins into a towering mattress that was leaking with the stuff and on the verge of tearing apart "...and I was more careful 'bout where I stashed me loot. T' make sure nobody could steal it."

"... but with nothin' but time on me claws now, I continued me treasure hunts. Back in those days, there were so many frontiers left unexploi...eh-unexplored..." he continued while his past self was looking over various maps with a nearby lantern illuminating the room.

"... so I set out t' DOUBLE me earnings..." we see Krabs, in adventurer clothes and with an arrow stuck in his fedora, whistling and strolling away from an Aztec-like temple with a wheel cart full of gold and various artifacts which he had grave-robbed from it.

"... then to triple 'em..." we see Krabs, dressed in tattered overalls, digging with his bare claws inside a deep hole (we wouldn't buy shovels) until the ground erupts and Krabs starts laughing in triumph as he's riding atop an oil fountain.

Around him, his (also shovel-lacking) workers looked up and cheered, until Krabs yelled, "Now get lost! Yer all FIRED!"

"... and then quadruple 'em!" we see some dark-scaled fish in tribal wear panic and flee out of their village, followed by a lion fish, sea rhino, and a couple of striped sea horses, as the former's village gets flattened by Krabs driving a gigantic bulldozer.

As the monstrous vehicle passes, the village and jungle transform into a vast rubber tree plantation filled with underpaid workers slaving away under the scorching sun, and we pan out to see Krabs, wearing suspenders, a white jacket, and a bolo tie, proudly looking over it. "Wherever the money was, I followed."

The Flying Dutchman smirked at Krabs. "Yes, but if memory serves, while ye raked in riches once in a while, ye weren't the best at holdin' on t' 'em fer long? What with yer many other hair-brained business ventures? Eh, eh?"

"Huh, guess that's nothing new either." A sardonic Squidward didn't doubt it. Krabs sent them both a cross look.

SpongeBob listened attentively. "Well...I guess you always were a hard worker at least, sir..."

Squidward sent him a tired glare. "You do realize what half of these exploits imply, right SpongeBob?" he asked flatly.

With a nervous look, SpongeBob didn't respond and instead kept his blue eyes on Krabs. "But Mr. Krabs, if you have been around this long...what about your mother? Did you share your youth-sustaining water with her-"

The Flying Dutchman laughed brashly. "No! I think it be an open secret that sharin' isn't in his nature." He sneered at his captive, getting spit on him as he talked.

"I'd say he ain't takin' after his old lady but then again..." he sent Krabs a knowing look "...she ain't yer old lady, is she?"

"I was getting' t' that!" Krabs said impatiently before giving the ghost an indignant glare. "And fer the record, she WAS me mother...jus' not by blood."

"W-was?" SpongeBob fidgeted, and Krabs stiffened after realizing his slip-up and sent the sponge a saddened look. The boy must have noticed how old Betsy had stopped vising the Krusty Krab asking her son for money a while ago.

Squidward was curious too. Did Krabs hire some random old lady to pretend to be his mother? Why even bother? Not like any of the local peons would care to ask the cantankerous miser where his parents were, or even assume they were still around.

Krabs sighed, "Tis was 70 years ago, it was jus' another annual trip t' the fountain, but unfortunately..."

He blushed in embarrassment, "...there was an accident."

We see Krabs, decked in the same explorer get-up as during his last trip, humming happily while approaching the glowing fountain with a rum jug in his claws.

But one of his peg-like legs got caught in a crack in the ground, making him flail around clumsily and drop the jug as he tried to keep his balance before falling into the fountain with a big splash.

We see his claws break the surface, growing smaller each time, until a tiny and adorable baby Eugene hauled himself out of the fountain, still clad in his now grossly oversized clothes.

"Aww, bawnacles!" he lamented in a ridiculously high-pitched voice as he looked at his reflection in the water.

"I retained me mental faculties, but I was no longer in the right shape t' do me usual business, forcin' me t' lay low til I was old enough t' resume me exploits. So I finagled me way into a foster home."

"You mean Betsy Krabs really isn't your mother?" a fidgeting SpongeBob gripped his seat. "But...but... you have the same last name?"

"Aye, we did." Krabs said with a sad smile. "It be a very common surname among crustaceans, especially in the old days. It worked out well enough fer me."

We cut to another flashback.

A diaper-wearing Eugene pulled a baby basket onto a front porch, panting heavily afterward. He couldn't wait to grow out of this pathetic, puny body. Joining the Navy when he was a strapping lad again would probably help speed things up.

He placed a note into it the basket, then jumped in himself, and knocked on the door, before pulling the blanket over him and adopting his best cute face as the door opened.

"Mother of pearl, what do we 'ave here?" a young Betsy appeared, wearing an old fashion floral sun hat, and picked up little Eugene. "Aren't ye jus' the most precious thing?"

He gave her the note to read, which just said, "I'm an adorable little doorstep baby, please adopt me. Name's Eugene."

"My, my..." Betsy grew a forlorn look. "We might be in the middle of a record-breaking economic depression but that's no excuse t' abandon helpless little babes."

"Don't worry, little one. Ye have a new home now." She cradled Eugene before carrying him in over her shoulder, allowing him to snicker evilly.

With a nostalgic glint in his eyes, Krabs sighed. "That woman was a real spitfire, she really was the ideal mother fer me."

His face turned somber again. "But she wasn't jokin'. At the time, few people in Bikini Bottom had a dime t' spare. Me and me new momma had t' scrape by. And I thought me first childhood was rough."

"And even that failed t' teach ye anythin'." The Flying Dutchman shook his head.

From his crew's looks, Krabs could tell they remembered his (second) childhood story, which he had first shared with them 13 years ago, shedding some light on his relationship with his mortal enemy.

"At school, I met me future nemesis and fer a while, we were thick as thieves, til our attempt t' start our own business drove us apart. We both struck out on our own, me Krabby Patties were an instant hit and soon enough, me and me mother were no longer livin' in squalor but I lost me best pal, who was in for a tough future, yadda, yadda, yadda, ye already know this."

"Heh, if it's any consolation..." the Flying Dutchman said with mock sympathy "...ye two villains will be on equal footin' once more, he's been waitin' fer ye."

"Oh?" Krabs just raised an eyebrow. "Guess his synthetic body finally quit on 'im, huh?"

The Flying Dutchman nodded and Krabs glanced down and sighed. "Well, guess I can at least try and apologize t' ol' Sheldon fer stringin' 'im along all these years."

Deep down, SpongeBob knew exactly what this meant, but he wouldn't accept it. "Mr. Krabs..." the trembling sponge started but was cut off.

"Boys, looks like this is it, we had a good run. Twenty years ain't bad." Krabs told his two employees with a sullen look. "Mr. Squidward, Mr. SquarePants, ye were the best crew I could have asked fer."

SpongeBob sniffed and his lips trembled, while Squidward sported a skeptical scowl.

"...well, mostly ye, SpongeBob. Ye were a model employee." Krabs pointed at the younger employee before turning to Squidward. "But I'll also miss yer sarcastic quips and disgruntled disposition, Squidward. It always helped t'.... balance out SpongeBob's boundless enthusiasm."

Squidward's face softened a bit. He knew that compliment was genuine.

"But what about Pearl?" SpongeBob hastily asked, desperate to keep this conversation from ending. "Why did you decide to adopt her? Was it because you yourself were adopted, or something else?"

The Flying Dutchman rolled his eyes while Krabs sported an uncertain look and rubbed the back of his head. "Not exactly...I think she'll do a better job explainin' why I took her in than I ever could."

"But, Mr. Krabs?! You still haven't told us why-"

"Yeah, yeah, story time's over!" The Flying Dutchman cut in irritably. "I'm not one t' deny a fellow sailor the chance t' share their life story in their final hour, but I absolutely *detest* long sappy goodbyes."

"So if ye don't mind..." he stuck his ghostly hand into Krabs's chest
"...I've been itchin' t' get me hands on yer wretched soul fer a long
time!"

"Take care of the Krusty Krab!" A mortified Krabs hastily told his
soon-to-be-former crew.

Squidward could do nothing but wave goodbye, but SpongeBob
panicked and jumped out of his seat.

"Nooo! Please, wait! You can't do this!" he cried and flailed his arms.

Denial and Acceptance

"Relax." The Flying Dutchman assured him in a professional manner. "I'll jus' be takin' his soul, I'll leave his lifeless husk fer ye t' bury. Or use as a mannequin, whatever floats yer boat."

"No, don't take him, I beg of you!" SpongeBob balled his eyes out and dropped to his knees. "Take me instead!"

"SpongeBob?" Squidward tried to talk some sense into him, only to realize his feet were submerged as the office started taking on water.

"Can't do." The Flying Dutchman shook his head. "One, yer far too wholesome fer Davy Jones's locker. And two, even the most deprived of souls don't deserve t' be subjected t' yer incessant blabberin' and torturous laugh!"

"SpongeBob, I'm afraid there's no gettin' out of this one..." Krabs told him in resignation. "I made me bed, and now I have t' sleep in it."

"SpongeBob, they're right. It's over, there's nothing you can do. We all have to go eventually." Squidward put his hand on the tearful sponge's shoulder, trying to be gentle. Even he couldn't help but feel a little sympathy for the sobbing wreck in front of him.

"No, no, no. It can't be." SpongeBob begged the Flying Dutchman again. "I can fix this! Just give me a chance! Please, if there's anything we can do to save Mr. Krabs, me and Squidward will not rest until we do it!"

"Hey, hey! Don't you drag me into this!" Squidward lamented angrily.

"There ain't nothin' ye can do!" the Flying Dutchman glared at SpongeBob, his tone final. "And even if there was, I wouldn't take ye up on it!" he added while lifting Krabs up to eye level. "This debt is long overdue!"

"But...but...there must be some loophole in your rules?" SpongeBob scrambled to think of a solution. "Or...or...some McGuffin that can prolong Mr. Krabs's life...or..."

His face and eyes were twitching, his speech devolved into incomprehensible rambling, and steam and sparks came out of his head holes until something in him broke and he buried his face into his hands.

"No, no, no. This cannot be happening! Oh, why! Why!?" he wept. "Not another! Grandma, Uncle Blue, Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy, all my Garies! Even Plankton! I can't lose Mr. Krabs too!"

Krabs was caught off guard and Squidward did a double take. Could it be?

"Wait? You knew about the Gary thing all along?!" The octopus scowled in realization. "You mean I had to bury all those festering corpses for nothing!"

"Please, I'll do ANYTHING if you spare Mr. Krabs!" With puffy eyes, SpongeBob's clung to the Flying Dutchman's ghostly tail, getting hot tears all over it. "You can't take him away from me!"

Faced with the sponge's ever-shriller crying, the Flying Dutchman cringed before looking at the former with a mixture of annoyance and pity.

"C'mon, SpongeBob! Enough with the waterworks." He tried to reason. "Yer a middle-aged sponge! Show some blasted dignity-"

"MOMMY!" SpongeBob cried and sobbed into his hands again as he and Squidward now stood in waist-deep water.

"SpongeBob, please. Ye have t' let me go. It won't do ye any good if..." Krabs feebly implored him only to find SpongeBob now dangling from one of his legs.

"Oh, Mr. Krabs.... don't leave us!" streams poured down the sponge's face, causing water levels to rise even further. It forced Squidward to climb onto the desk.

"Will ye cease with this malarkey! Ye can't prevent the inevitable!" the exasperated Flying Dutchman grabbed SpongeBob by the legs and tried to pry him off Krabs but to no avail, as SpongeBob stretched like a piece of rubber. "Let go, ye little fool!?"

"No, no, no! You can't separate us! I won't let it." SpongeBob wept like a petulant child, holding onto Krabs's leg with an iron grip.

"Ye dare defy THE FLYING DUTCHMAN!?" The ghost's nostrils flared in anger as he kept trying to break them apart.

Standing on the desk and with the water going up to his knees, Squidward whistled and started clapping his tentacles to get the other's attention.

"Enough of this!" he shouted as the others looked at him, before exhaling to ease his nerves and pulling on a plug that drained all the water out of the office.

Squidward then locked eyes with the Flying Dutchman. "It would seem we have reached an impasse."

The Flying Dutchman growled in reluctant acceptance. "The big-nosed one is right. How 'bout a compromise?"

"So you're gonna let Mr. Krabs live!" SpongeBob beamed with joy but the Flying Dutchman snarled at him, swiftly squashing the yellow twit's delusional hopes.

"NO, I ain't gonna let 'im live!" he stated before shuddering in annoyance. "But if ye're gonna throw such a hissy fit over it, I'm willin' to make a deal."

He lowered SpongeBob and Krabs to the damp floor, where Squidward joined them. The Flying Dutchman scowled at them and put his hands on his hips.

"Tis far more than ye deserve, Krabs. But if ye've been cheatin' death fer 300 years..." he groaned, slapped his face, ran his hand across it, and then shrugged "...I suppose it won't make a difference if I let ye live fer another month."

"A month?" Krabs asked in surprise. Surprised that he had been given that long.

"Aye." The ghost pirate nodded. "So yer friends and family, or the closest thing ye have t' such, can come t' terms with yer fate. Especially THAT emotional basket case." He pointed his crooked finger at SpongeBob, who shrank into his square pants.

"Listen well, SpongeBob. If this connivin', crustaceous crooks means so much t' ye, ye better enjoy yer remainin' time together and accept that he won't be around fer the rest of yer life. Death is death and ye can't escape the reality of it. Plungin' yerself into denial will only make the pain worse."

SpongeBob just whimpered and Krabs tried to put a comforting claw on him when he realized that the Flying Dutchman had turned his steely gaze at him and narrowed his eyes.

"And ye." The Flying Dutchman said darkly. "Make use of what time ye have left, cuz when I come back, there will be *no turnin' back* and ye'll get yer eternal "reward". Understand?"

"Crystal clear." Krabs hung his head.

"Good, see ye very soon." The Flying Dutchman said with a sneer before erupting with his trademark maniacal laughter and spinning around, morphing into a whirling thunderstorm and vanishing.

Once the green smoke and lighting were gone, SpongeBob and Squidward were finally alone with Mr. Krabs, able to try and digest this rapid new development. Much more so the former.

SpongeBob's nose dropped and his eyes went googly. He was at a loss for words and the other two didn't know quite what to say either.

"SpongeBob, you actually surprised me." Squidward broke the ice, his tone even. "You're not *completely delusional* ...you're just obsessively blocking out any negative facts from your mind to the point that you're *almost* completely delusional."

"I know...it's a sorta bad habit..." was all SpongeBob could say. The first thought Squidward had was to inquire if this meant that SpongeBob knew all along that the former couldn't stand his guts but decided this was an inappropriate time for it.

"In that case...I wholeheartedly agree with the Flying Dutchman." Squidward continued with a serious look. "Take it from someone who had to learn that simple truth the hard way. We can't escape reality, and denial just makes things all the more painful. I wasted my whole life pursuing a pipe dream that I could never have hoped to accomplish, especially when pitted against my late rival, and look where that got me?"

"Nowhere." He gestured at himself. "I'm just a bitter old mess stuck in the same crummy position I was in 40 years ago, as a bitter young mess. But ever since I came to terms with my own mistakes, I've felt better than I did in decades. I have...if I dare say, found enlightenment."

Crossing his tentacles, he added. "My only regret now is not getting the chance to admit defeat to Squilliam's smug face *personally* . I had to do it to his grave."

"Aye, truer words have never been spoken." Krabs agreed. "Ye can't jus' pretend bad things don't exist and everythin' is all hunky-dory

when it ain't. Positive thinkin' be nice and all, but there will always be too much of a good thing."

He pinched his forehead. "Like how we can't avoid the fact that we all eventually wither away and die, so we need t' make the most out of the time we've got, not waste our lives bein' stuck in the past. I tried t' defy that and all it got me in the end was a nice cozy room in Davy Jones' locker."

"Can't say I don't feel a bit sorry for you, Eugene." Squidward rubbed the back of his neck. "But even if we got you declared "humanitarian of the millennium" by the end of the month or something, I doubt that would be enough to scrub your record clean."

"I know, I may be old but I ain't senile." Krabs sadly nodded. "I have accepted me fate."

Sniffing, SpongeBob jumped and gave him a big, tearful hug. "I'm gonna miss you so much!"

Silently, Krabs patted his back until the sponge released him. "I'll miss ye too, boyo. Ye were like the son I never had. I'm jus' sorry I wasn't a better father figure t' ye. I could have taught ye a lot but instead, I opted t' keep ye in yer lil' comfort bubble fer two decades because it was convenient fer me business."

"So this is really it then?" a despondent SpongeBob asked while wiping away his tears. "The Krusty Crew is no more? After all this time, we're finally gonna split up?"

"Fraid so, SpongeBob." Krabs put his arm around him. "But like I said, twenty years ain't a bad run, even with all the ups and downs. You'll always have those memories to cherish."

He grew a small smile. "But let's be real though, all three of us lost our luster years ago. We need to move on and accept that we ain't the power trio we were two decades ago."

"Definitely not, we're just three old has-beens who overstayed their welcome." Squidward agreed. "We can't just rinse and repeat forever, change can be good or bad but is an inevitability and one must adapt to it."

"I understand." SpongeBob sighed. "I guess I just regret denying it for so long. Like me being an aging sponge who still clings on to his childish sensibilities..."

"That's... not inherently a bad thing." Squidward said with some reluctance. "I've been into art and music since I was 11. Your passions are your passions, but what's important is to be an adult in your mind, to know when to...dial back certain things. But I would be a bit of a hypocrite if I lectured you about it. I held on to my childish dreams of attaining unparalleled success long after I should have grown up and lowered my expectations."

"Yeah, I've noticed that..." SpongeBob said in a small voice. "Guess Squilliam's departure had something to do with it?"

"Sort of..." Squidward admitted "...he actually kinda helped me see the light a few years back, as strange as that may sound. But it took me a while to fully accept it."

"Guess you did some soul-searchin' while I was on me last adventure, huh?" Krabs asked. Squidward nodded.

"Yeah, Squilliam's passing threw me for a bit of a loop, given how static my life's been for so long, but I think that I came out wiser in the end. And wisdom should come with age, right?" he shrugged with a small smirk.

SpongeBob wiped a tear. "Guess I too should pay a visit to the cemetery. I have a few old friends and family members that I've neglected to visit for far too long. And I should probably rename my newest snail, given that she's a she. Do you guys prefer Mary or Cary?"

"And quit boating school... for all our sakes." Squidward added in a firm manner. "Not like you ever really needed a boatmobile."

"Oh, yes. Promise me that you'll be a chronic *walker* fer the rest of yer days." Krabs agreed and held onto SpongeBob's shoulder. "It's good fer yer health as well t' use yer own two legs instead of relyin' on those unholy metal contraptions fer transport. I never trusted those things." SpongeBob nodded in resignation.

"Sure...guess that was also a bit of a crazy pipe dream..." he admitted before letting out a small, involuntary giggle.

"Even in my dreams, I couldn't get that Neptune-forsaken boating license. Mrs. Puff always showed up to tear it apart. And ain't dreams conjured up by your subconsciousness, so maybe it was trying to tell me something?" he jokingly knocked on his head.

"See, it takes a strong man t' admit his faults. Maybe both of ye lads have changed over the years, after all... ye jus' needed a big, big, radical push t' realize it." Krabs smiled before sighing. "Too bad I never got one til it was too late."

With a stern look, he pointed at SpongeBob. "So don't ye dare repeat my mistakes, SpongeBob. Don't be stuck in the past and always keep yer big, blue orbs on the future. I'm sorry I didn't try t' teach ye this before, but better late than never. Are we clear, Mr. SquarePants?"

"Yes, sir. Understood, sir." SpongeBob saluted him, for old times' sake.

"And Mr. Squidward." Krabs turned to the octopus with an almost pleading smile. "I hope ye'll take good care of me old vessel. Consider this yer official promotion."

"Don't worry, Eugene." Squidward folded his tentacles and gave a respectful nod. "An old geezer such as myself ain't goin' anywhere at this point in his life, so I'll commit to the job I've got. Can't say there

won't be any changes but I'll try to stay true to the spirit of the Krusty Krab as much as possible."

"That's all I ask fer." Krabs didn't argue, at peace with Squidward's decision. Any good captain needed to be his own man and not obsess about filling in the boots of his predecessor. The past was the past.

"C'mon, Squid. You're not *that* old." SpongeBob tried to tell him with a smile.

"Not that old?" Squidward scoffed with a smirk before rubbing his back. "I've been suffering chronic back pains for years."

The other two cringed as they heard Squidward's back make a small crack and the latter tried to ignore it and kept his strained smile. "I should have quit interpretive dancing at least a decade ago, then maybe my spine would be more merciful right now."

"Oh, that's nothing." SpongeBob quipped and pointed at his eyes. "My peepers haven't been up to snuff for three years now. Had to wear contact lenses and to be honest... I can't stand these things."

Narrowing his eyes, he popped them off and put on his jellyfishing glasses. "I think I'll just wear regular spectacles from now on, they go better with my dorky sense of fashion, but also convey a sense of maturity?"

Squidward rubbed his chin. "Nothing to be ashamed of, SpongeRobert, old boy. I think you pull off the four-eyed look nicely."

"Much appreciated, Squidster." SpongeBob quipped back with a finger gun, his voice finally dropping (now sounding like Tom Kenny's normal speaking voice).

They heard Krabs's famous chortled laugh as the latter waved his claw. "Ye old chuckleheads still have some growin' left t' do, both of

ye. I've aged like seahorse milk this week and lemme tell ye, once ye reach my age, it ain't gonna be pretty."

For emphasis, he turned around and pulled up his shirt. Squidward and SpongeBob's eyes widened in horror, the former clutching his eyeballs while screaming "My eyes!", and the latter covered his mouth as he was about to vomit all over the floor.

"Jus' so ye know what's in store fer ye." Krabs chuckled and turned around. "But enough 'bout the past or future. We need t' discuss the *present*."

Walking up to Squidward and SpongeBob, Krabs threw his arms over them, pulling them closer.

"All work and no fun ain't healthy fer a trio of older gents like us. And since I don't have t' worry 'bout material possessions anymore, how 'bout the three of us, and maybe an old friend or two, all go on a month-long cruise? I'll cover the expenses and spare none. And I *mean it* this time."

SpongeBob and Squidward didn't need to be told twice, and the room erupted with good-natured laughter; high-pitched bleating, a deep honk, and a chortled pirate laugh.

"But we can certainly exploit *senior discounts* ." Krabs added with a wink.

Well, the fic is now three-quarters complete. If you think it felt a bit rushed or that I played certain topics too lightly, this is because this isn't meant to be some grand finale wrapping up the show, but more of a tongue-in-cheek sendoff if you will. Like it or not, the show's legacy has been supremely tainted by its long-running status and infamous decline in quality. I can't simply pretend like the dark age of SpongeBob or the subsequent Zombie SpongeBob era never happened (I just arbitrarily cut off from "canon" in 2020, when I wrote "Some

Things Never Change") and like its two predecessors, this is more of a metaphor for the show's own history and refusal to end long after it lost its luster. Squidward and to a lesser extent Sandy changed and grew in "Finite", and now, so did SpongeBob and Mr. Krabs. Unfortunately for the latter, this change entails death, like with his old enemy Plankton XD

Krabs Kicks the Bucket

One Month Later...

The smell of brine and the vast expanse of the underwater ocean brought a lot of fond (and not-so-fond) memories back to old Mr. Krabs, as did the sun setting over the blue horizon, overseeing a chain of westward tropical islands. He and his companions weren't concerned with joining the loud party going on behind them on the deck, they were content with chilling at the rails and observing the serene sunset.

The aging crustacean wore the maroon bathrobe SpongeBob had given him, since the light evening breeze was quite chilly for the decrepit old geezer, and he had to support himself on a cane. For the last 30 days, hyper-accelerated senescence did a number on him. His shell was even more grayish and lumpy now, cracking in a few places and sporting liver spots everywhere.

"I tell ye..." he said in a deep but wheezy voice, lacking any of the commanding nature it once carried, "...as much as I love me money, nothin' be quite as beautiful as watchin' the sun settin' over the great blue beyond."

"Eugene, don't tell me you're going to cry?" Squidward asked lightheartedly, leaning on the railings of the ocean liner. He wore a Hawaiian shirt and lei garland, and tilted his sunglasses over his eyes to meet Krabs's gaze.

Wiping away the tears from his crusty eyestalks, Krabs smirked back. "So I'm a sentimental ol' fool, sue me." He chuckled. "I've spent most of me early life on the high seas, ever since I was a lowly cabin boy. It's only fittin' that I spend me final days cruisin' the seas."

"I know where you're coming from, Eugene." Squidward shrugged. "I'll be playing the clarinet until the day my lungs cease working."

Krabs let out a throat chuckle only to erupt into a loud coughing fit.

"Mr. Krabs, you feeling okay?" SpongeBob asked in concern, standing next to Squidward, clad in a similar shirt, and wearing sandals.

"I'm fine lad..." Krabs assured him "...it's jus...ye know."

SpongeBob just gave a sullen nod. The group had agreed not to dwell on this too much and enjoy themselves. But their vacation was nearing its end, and SpongeBob knew what that meant and dreaded it.

"And what 'bout ye, SpongeBob?" Krabs asked. "Ye gonna keep grilling dem patties til yer old and gray like me?"

"Of course I will." SpongeBob perked up. "It's my life passion, and not to toot my own horn, but I am the best fry cook in all of Bikini Bottom."

"Ever so humble, but who am I to argue?" Squidward snarked. "Nobody makes those artery-clogging burgers like you do, and it's what makes all the local peons flock to the Krusty Krab in droves."

"Yeah, it sure ain't your sunny disposition, *boss* ." SpongeBob retorted jokingly.

"Hey, I ain't gonna charge them to go to the bathroom, or try to sell them expired patties, so I'm confident I'll do *slightly better* with my approval rating." Squidward shrugged while eyeing Krabs, who shook his head good-naturedly.

"Yeah, sorry, Mr. K." SpongeBob had to agree. "But me and Squid agree that you have to spend some money in order to make money."

"Ye youth and yer strange business practices." Krabs rolled his eyes. "Guess I really did overstay me welcome; this topsy-turvy modern world jus' vexes me t' no end."

"Ah still can't believe ya actually discovered the Fountain of Youth and sapped it dry." Sandy shook her head, leaning on the rails next to SpongeBob, and wearing a Hawaiian dress and her usual helmet adorned with a flower. "This would 'ave been thu scientific discovery of thu millennium and ya jus' gone and squandered it."

This had been one crazy revelation to her, though it did explain why those old sepia-colored photos of that evil oil tycoon her great-aunt Rosie fought to save her hometown looked so familiar, among a host of other things.

"Eh, no point in cryin' over spilled milk, mammal." Krabs waved his claw jokingly. "What would ye have done with it anyways? Make a formula for growin' giant acorns?"

Sandy rolled her eyes. While she stayed cordial for SpongeBob's sake (and the free cruise), she couldn't exactly say that she would miss the xenophobic old sidewinder.

So instead, she turned to her spongy friend. "It's still weird ta see ya like this, SpongeBob. All things considered." She said with a lopsided smile. "It's like ah 'aven't seen ya in ten years and ya came back a changed man."

"I simply grew up, Sandy. We all have to eventually." SpongeBob smiled before growing sheepish. "And...eh...sorry about the whole Gary business and leading you astray for years."

The squirrel grew a slight scowl. "Yeah, ya hornswoggled me real good, SpongeBob, but..." she sighed tiredly "...ah suppose ah ain't blameless either. Ah did enable ya fer years ta be stuck in yer comfort bubble."

SpongeBob patted her hand, giving her a reassuring smile. "It's all fine and dandy, *Sandy* ."

The squirrel rolled her eyes at the lame joke. "You just did what you thought was best for me, as any friend would, and I'm grateful that I'll

still have you for the foreseeable future. You always had my back, even when I screwed up royally."

Sandy grew a small smile, trying not to cry, when Squidward looked at her and added, "Don't worry, Sponge. She's the most vigorous one here, she'll probably outlive us all."

Sandy barked a laugh. "I should hope so."

"Hah, unlikely." Krabs laughed it off. "Dames jus' don't have t' grit t' outlast us men."

SpongeBob and Squidward gave him awkward looks and the latter tugged his collar, while Sandy frowned but let the remark slide. By all accounts, she should have been more upset about his patronizing attitude, but Krabs came from a very different time and held different values, mostly faulty ones. In some ways, she pitied him for being (literally) so old-fashioned.

"And will ye chuckleheads stop with all this talk 'bout the future, we're here t' enjoy our vacation." Krabs reminded them. "The fireworks should start any time now."

"Well...ya can't ignore it either." Sandy countered, leaning on the railings. "Da boss monkeys expect results, and as soon as we return ta Bikini Bottom, I'll 'ave ta double mah efforts ta make up fer lost time."

"Not that ah'm not up fer thu challenge." She added with an air of confidence.

"I hear you. SpongeBob and I will also have our hands full." Squidward concurred with some worry. "We'll have to hire new help, make some renovations at the Krusty Krab, get the hang of our new responsibilities, especially me. It will be quite the challenge."

"Yeah..." SpongeBob said sadly while sharing a knowing glance with Mr. Krabs "...but we'll make it through. Change can be scary but we'll

soldier on just like Mr. Krabs did."

"That's the spirit, boyo." Krabs chortled before starting to cough again, but he collected himself. "Never stop bein' the hard worker that made this old sea dog so proud fer so many years."

"Yeesh, you guys remember that we're on vacation, right? What's all the hullabaloo about work?" Patrick said as he finally rejoined them. He too wore a Hawaiian shirt but it was stained and so was his mouth, as he carried a plate with him and threw cocktail weenies into his mouth. "Try driving down the slow lane for once."

"Back from looting the all-you-can-eat buffet, I see?" Squidward scoffed.

"You bet!" Patrick grinned and scarfed down the rest in one gulp before throwing the plate over his shoulder, followed by another passenger screaming "OW!"

"So, what have you guys been doing, besides work talk?" the starfish asked idly, his tone chill and serene.

"Jus' enjoyin' the view, Patrick." Krabs replied. "Care t' join us?"

Patrick didn't say anything and just leaned on the rails next to Sandy, the five of them silently watching the sun setting and the sky darkening, and stars slowly started popping up all across it. The group couldn't help but get emotional.

"This feels like the end of an era, lads." Krabs said fondly.

"Yeah, it was nice w-while it lasted." SpongeBob lifted his glasses to wipe a tear. "We sure made our mark in cartoon history during our heyday."

"Yup, they don't make shows like they used to. Least of all at Nickelodeon." Squidward added.

Sandy snorted. "And ta think people worried that watchin' Barney would rot kids' brains."

"Yeah, those hacks really lost the plot." Krabs added and the group shared a hearty laugh.

Until Patrick stopped and sported a confused expression. "Ehhh...I don't get it?"

"It's meta humor, Pat." SpongeBob said helpfully. "I'll explain it to ya later."

Patrick squinted. "SpongeBob, your voice still sounds funny? Maybe you should go see the doctor?"

SpongeBob laughed. "No, my voice just dropped. It comes with the territory of growing up."

Misinterpreting what his best friend meant, Patrick laughed back. "SpongeBob, you really need to stop being such a worrywart. There's no rush, you still have most of your life ahead of you. You'll grow up when the time comes, now you should just kick back and smell the flowers like I do."

"Eh...hate ta burst yer bubble, Pat." Sandy said cheekily. "But bein' in yer 40s ain't exactly young. You, 'im and ah are middle-aged at best."

Puzzled, Patrick counted off his nonexistent fingers and realized the Texan squirrel was right.

"Oh, right?" he made a face as he recollected something. "Is that why there was a big four and three on my last birthday cake?"

The others just blinked with unamused looks while SpongeBob nodded.

"Yup, and you should be turning 44 real soon." He pointed out. "I think your birthday is coming in two months."

"Oh..." Patrick's brow furrowed and he rested his chin on his fist as a nagging thought bugged him in the recesses of his empty mind.

"Jus' 44? From me perspective, he's still a wee baby." Krabs quipped while making the appropriate gesture with his shriveled-up, liver-spot-covered claw.

"Who isn't?" Squidward snarked in retort but before Krabs could reply, he coughed anew.

Squidward grew a concerned look. "Maybe you should sit down for a few minutes."

"Nay!" Krabs waved his claw in a grumpy fashion. "I'll jus' go over and get me a drink, t' rinse me achin' throat."

"I can help you, sir." SpongeBob followed him but Krabs held his claw up.

"In yer dreams! I may be dyin' but I can still walk myself." He insisted before smiling.

"And none of this "sir" business." He added jokingly. "Squidward's yer boss now, I'm jus' a senile ol' codger who happens to be yer friend. Are we clear?"

"Yes, si... *Eugene* ." SpongeBob offered an awkward smile. It still didn't feel right to call his old boss by his first name. It was as perverse as calling his own parents Harold and Margaret.

"And don't ye have somethin' t' tell that squirrel?" Krabs added knowingly, to get the sponge off his back.

"Oh, right." SpongeBob rubbed the back of his head. "Just don't miss the fireworks, we'll be waiting for you."

"Run along, lad. I'll be back in a jiffy." Krabs nodded and they parted ways. Ignoring the loud music, Krabs staggered past the partying

youngsters, his bones creaking with every move, and arrived near the punch bowl.

Dunking a plastic cup and scooping up some of the punch, Krabs walked off, aiming to rejoin his group but along the way, he spotted a fold-up chair left on the deck and felt compelled to sit on it.

"Ufffff..." he wheezed and felt some of the strain on his body waning. "Guess I can take a little break from all this walkin'." He rationalized and took a sip before leaning into the chair.

"Quite comfy too..." he smiled contently as his eyelids grew heavy.

"Did you get Krabs to sit down?" Squidward asked the returning SpongeBob.

"He sat down himself, he needs some rest." SpongeBob whispered back. "He said he will be back soon."

"Um, guys..." Sandy leaned towards them and pointed at Patrick. "Ah think somethin' is wrong with 'im?"

The starfish looked constipated, sweating, pursing his lips, and with a vein bulging on his temple, as he seemed to be in deep thought. Sparks started flying off his head until something switched in his brain, causing his eyes to grow in size, filled with horror and dread, and the corners of his mouth hung down.

"Patrick, you alright?" SpongeBob inquired when the starfish clutched his head and started sweating bullets.

"Holy shrimp! It HAS been that long! I've been procrastinating for 20 years!" he screamed with renewed lucidity. "I let half my life fly by me! I need to get my GED pronto! Find work! Get insurance!"

The other exchanged glances before Squidward chuckled in a snarky tone. "Now who's being a worrywart, Pat?"

"Guess denial is another hobby ya two share, eh?" Sandy eyed SpongeBob with a smirk.

The sponge blushed and cleared his throat. "Speaking of that. Sandy? There's something I gotta tell you?"

"What's that, SpongeBob?"

SpongeBob took in a deep breath. "It's something I should have told ya a long time ago, I just need to get it off my chest."

Squidward watched them, raising his brow, while Patrick was still in the middle of a panic attack. "Night classes? Yes, yes, that's what I'll do."

"Hey, whatever it is, ya can tell me. No secrets between us anymore." Sandy said with a gentle smile.

Smiling, SpongeBob reached out and touched her hand on the railings.

"Sandy, I just wanted to say..." he leaned closer and whispered to her "...I know the real reason why your karate hasn't been up to snuff...and, y'know, the hair dye."

Sandy jerked back, her pupils shrinking in horror and her bushy tail bristling.

"What in tarnation..." she whined in embarrassment. "Is it THAT obvious?"

"Hey, no shame in growing old, Sandy." SpongeBob raised his hands nervously. "I don't think less of you because of it."

"Yeah, we all need to age with dignity." Squidward put his tentacle on her shoulder.

"Yes, and the skunk stripe look works for ya." SpongeBob added before shrinking sheepishly. "Umm...not to imply anything about your

bodily odor."

Sandy eased up a bit and let out a weak chuckle. "Guess ah was a bit ashamed of that..." she admitted with a sullen sigh.

"We're all friends here, nobody will judge ya." Squidward shrugged. "And honestly, what moron would mock you about it to your face?"

Hearing that, Sandy cheered up. "Ah guess...on thu bright side, ah can finally rinse off this stupid hair dye. That stuff makes mah hide itch worse than a pack of flees."

SpongeBob cringed, remembering that time Sandy brought back a single flee from Texas and it multiplied real quick. "Yeah, I can imagine."

Suddenly, they and the panicking Patrick heard loud bangs and were illuminated by a bright glow. There was a huge festival on the biggest island in front of their ship and fireworks flew left and right, filling the dark night sky with vibrant explosions of colors.

"Wow..." SpongeBob gripped the railings, with Squidward, Sandy, and even Patrick looking in awe as well "...what a sight!"

"Yeah, what was I freaking out about again?" Patrick asked.

The loud noise made Krabs open his heavy eyelids, causing the gross crust on them to crack apart.

"What now?" he looked up and saw the fireworks and his companions at the stern of the boat, their silhouettes cast against the bright light.

"Oh...don't wanna be late fer the fireworks." He got up and walked towards them, forgetting his cane.

"Hey, lads. Hope I didn't miss too much?" Krabs said as he approached SpongeBob and observed the spectacle.

Krabs chortled with newfound vigor. "Now that's what I call ending things with a bang, right?" he asked SpongeBob, but the latter didn't respond. Were the fireworks too loud for him to hear Krabs?

"Hey, SpongeBob?" Krabs raised his voice but the sponge still didn't respond. Until he suddenly looked around, seemingly oblivious to Krabs's presence.

"Where's Mr. Krabs? He's missing this?"

Squidward looked over his shoulder and smirked. "Looks like the old coot dozed off again? Better wake him up."

Confused, Krabs turned around and was startled to see *himself* still sitting in the chair, peaceful and with his withered limbs on the armrests.

Before Krabs could process that, SpongeBob raced forward, part of him fazing through Krabs, spooking the latter further as he watched SpongeBob run up to his other self and try to stir him awake.

"Mr. Krabs? Eh...I mean Eugene, wake up." SpongeBob slowly raised his voice. "You're missing the fireworks."

Krabs saw Squidward's expression turn into one of concern as SpongeBob failed to get a reaction.

"Mr. Krabs?" SpongeBob asked again, worry entering his voice.

"Dear Neptune..." the octopus said dejectedly as he hurried after SpongeBob, catching Sandy and Patrick's attention, the two exchanging glances and following him, leaving Krabs all alone.

Reluctantly, Krabs accepted what this meant and wasn't the least bit surprised when he felt a large, green hand grasping his shoulder.

With quiet dignity, Krabs looked up and saw the Flying Dutchman looking down at him, smiling.

"It is time." He said simply.

"I understand." Krabs sighed and glanced one last time at SpongeBob and the others gathering around his motionless body, slowly putting the pieces together.

"I'm ready." He turned back to the Flying Dutchman, his tone unflinching, and the latter nodded as a portal opened in front of them.

None of the other passengers seemed to notice it and the Flying Dutchman led Krabs into it before it closed.

This certainly hadn't been a happy ending to their vacation but all of them knew it was coming. Needless to say, SpongeBob didn't take it well, nor did he make much of an effort to reign in his feelings of great sorrow, and even Squidward couldn't help but feel down in the dumps for a while. And this wasn't like when Squilliam passed away. For all their head-butting, Krabs was still something of a friend to him and Squidward had a hard time imagining how he and SpongeBob could go on without their captain but knew that the two of them had to figure it out on their own.

A large crowd had gathered at the Bikini Bottom cemetery. It paled in comparison to the one that came to say farewell to Squilliam, but plenty of Bikini Bottomites still knew of Eugene Krabs, the infamously stingy and penny-pinching founder and proprietor of the Krusty Krab.

Everyone was dressed in black, including those in the front, consisting of a composed but saddened Squidward, Patrick, who shed a single tear, a tearful Pearl, an ambivalent-looking Sandy, and a likewise tearful Mrs. Puff, and of course, SpongeBob, who was bawling his eyes out as the coffin was lowered into the grave, with tombstone reading:

R.I.P EUGENE H. KRABS, 1610-2020, Father, Entrepreneur, Sailor, Skinflint Supreme

Bikini Bottom would never be the same after this but everyone did eventually move on. Her father's death was a bit of a wakeup call, and Pearl used the inheritance he had left her to open her own boutique and employed her best friends in it, with SpongeBob deciding to stop by every once in a while to give them pointers, less they went out of business in a month due to chatting on the phone with their gal pals more than actually attending to customers.

Larry, approaching his mid-50s, decided to take Sandy's advice, after she opened up about her secret shame, and to retire from bodybuilding, and went back to managing his gym full time, to help a new generation of Bikini Bottomites get swole. He was also happy to finally get rid of the corset he had been wearing to hide his growing paunch. With SpongeBob quitting boating school and her on-again, off-again boyfriend departed, Mrs. Puff finally retired and left Bikini Bottom for the Florida Keys, but reportedly, she never arrived and registered at her new apartment. Rumors say she had an ugly run-in with some old associates of hers from the slammer.

The Chum Bucket was no more, but not the building itself hadn't been shut down, as Karen, claiming ownership of it after her husband's unexpected death (she *might* have ignored his pleas to be let in before his synthetic body deteriorated), renovated it and turned it into a compute shop, though the location didn't serve as her home as well anymore.

"Oh, the joys of emancipation." The W.I.F.E. said happily as she cleaned the living room with a feather duster.

"Meow. Meow?" Mary asked from her snail bed, which was crawling with baby snails.

"I tried to get a divorce several times, but the courts remain anti-tech." Karen explained and clenched her fist before stroking the bottom of her monitor in contemplation. "Maybe I should start a movement?"

As she kept moving, she reached a framed picture of two superheroes in their prime and dusted it.

She shook her monitor in disbelief. "Can't believe he still idolizes those tights-wearing has-beens."

The camera pans up high into the sky, to the top of one of the flower clouds. There, we see a large gathering of elderly folks, all emanating a heavenly glow and surrounded by light purple mist, sitting at a bingo game.

One table included Betsy Krabs, Marion SquarePants, and Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy.

"B-46..." the bored announcer droned before faceplanting on his table.

"BONKO!" Mermaid Man shouted, much to Barnacle Boy's ire.

"Will ya stop that, you old coot!"

"C'mon, you buzzkill. Just messing with ya." Mermaid Man elbowed him in jest. He had been free of his dementia for nearly a decade now.

Barnacle Boy was unamused. "You've been making that same stupid joke for six years now. Can ya at least bring some new material to the table?"

"Sorry, this old hero ain't got the boundless imagination of that silly sponge." Mermaid Man shrugged before looking down at the world below. "Say, you think the kid still thinks of us once in a while?"

"He's probably the only one who still does." Barnacle Boy deadpanned while a begrudging smile formed on his face.

We pan back to the world of the living and see the Krusty Krab, as some worker fish are giving it a new paint job, the first once it had received in 15 years.

In his office, Squidward, wearing similar clothes as his predecessor (including actual pants) chuckled with schadenfreude as he read a paper detailing some scandalous "news" about Squilliam's past relationships with currently famous actresses and supermodels. The issue was that they weren't officially *women* yet at the time of their affairs under the legal definition.

"Oh, Otto. You always were such a player." Squidward chuckled as he closed the newspaper and left his office. With this being out, perhaps others will feel compelled to publicly speak out against Squilliam as well. He would always have his devoted fanatics who treat him like a saint, but Squidward had a hunch that his old rival's reputation might not go untarnished for long.

He stepped out into the eating area and actually took a moment to admire it. It mostly remained the same, save for getting cleaned up and polished, and there was a big picture of the Krusty Krab's founder on the east wall, showing him grinning in front of his establishment, still sporting those unflattering sweat stains under his armpits.

Squidward had hired a bunch of new workers over the last six months, mostly teenagers and young adult planning to work at this place for a brief time until their dream careers finally took off the ground. Old Man Tentacles made sure to tell them that they better make backup plans in case their dreams went down the crapper. He doubted any of them would heed his advice but at least nobody could accuse him of inaction.

Seeing one pimply worker with a mop leaning against the wooden column and listening to music, and another one, with braces covering her mangled buckteeth, being distracted typing on her phone, Squidward shook his head and clapped his tentacles.

"Derek, Lori. Back to work." He said evenly as they snapped back to attention, flustered. "Two more hours and you can have your next break."

"Yes, Mr. Tentacles." One said nervously as he resumed mopping the floor, while the other grabbed the platters she had left on the empty table.

"Right on it, Mr. Tentacles."

Squidward didn't chew them out for it, not wishing to be a hypocrite, and just continued to observe his restaurant, when he heard the restaurant's most senior employee saying, "Here ya go, Pat. This one's on me."

He saw SpongeBob, wearing his glasses and old KK hat, giving Patrick a Monster Krabby Patty, the latter wearing a shirt and tie and carrying a briefcase.

The starfish swallowed the massive burger in one gulp, making SpongeBob wince a bit.

"Pat, you don't have to-

"Sorry, man. Can't talk." Patrick held his hand up and hurried to his table while cleaning his face with a hanky. "My break will be over in 15 minutes."

Squidward walked up to SpongeBob and they saw a stone-faced Patrick doing accountant work on his table, complete with a calculator and computer he brought along with him.

Squidward whistled in amazement. "Patrick really is serious about picking up the slack."

"Yeah, Sandy keeps slapping herself whenever she sees this." SpongeBob quipped before sighing. "He's taking adult life *very seriously*. I hardly get to see him these days."

"I'm sure you two will work out a schedule." Squidward shrugged. "That's adult life for ya."

"I know, but it goes get a bit dull and repetitive at times." SpongeBob admitted. "But dem's the breaks, huh?"

"SpongeRobert, I don't think we are in a position to be complaining about *repetitiveness* ." Squidward replied with dry sarcasm, causing SpongeBob to chuckle in amusement.

"I know..." the latter said "...guess I've owed you this conversation for years?"

"Oh, yes you did." Squidward put his tentacle over SpongeBob's shoulder and led him to their private table. "How about we get some coffee and then gripe endlessly about our personal inconveniences?"

"Sure, I've got plenty to gripe about." SpongeBob agreed, allowing a little healthy cynicism to dilute his once-toxic positivity.

We pan down... deep, deep below the Earth's crust to find Davy Jones's locker tucked away in a cave filled with stalagmites. Though small and unassuming on the outside, once we zoom in, we find that it's far bigger on the inside, housing a dark, endless corridor filled with countless doors on both walls. Inside one of the many workout rooms, we find four treadmills and the departed souls forced to use them.

The Flying Dutchman, wearing a tracksuit and sweatband that left his gross balding head exposed, blew on a whistle and yelled, "Faster, ye scurvy dogs! Me grand-mommy runs faster than that!"

"My little legs weren't made for this." Old Man Jenkins lamented while running on his treadmill, wearing workout clothes.

Next to him was Squilliam, dressed the same, wheezing and struggling to keep running on his treadmill. The never-ending smell of sweaty gym socks was asphyxiating.

"Please, this has to be some sort of mistake!" he wept pathetically. "I don't belong here! I have so many more years ahead of me!"

"HAH!" the Flying Dutchman leaned down at him with glee. "Ye've earned yer place here back when ye actually turned 35, Mantelmeyer! Ye jus' kept addin' more skeletons t' yer closet after that!"

"But...but...I was still so-"

"Fool, death is a like an iggly wiggly lil'spider!" The Dutchman barked a laugh. "It creeps up on ye on when ye least expect it!"

He blew his whistle again, so loud that it nearly ruptured Squilliam's eardrums and motivated him to run faster.

"Now put some muscle into it, ye sissy! Run faster! FASTER!" the ghost pirate roared before gesturing to Squilliam's left. "Try bein' more like these unrepenting rascallions!"

Those two were Krabs and Plankton, wearing their own workout clothes and running on their respective treadmills with iron determination.

"I still can't believe the Krabby Patty formula was a sham!" Plankton griped as he glared at his old nemesis. "You've strung me along all these years! You've *ruined my life* without a shred of guilt just so you could fill your wallet with more money!?"

Then he laughed with wicked glee. "I gotta commend you, Eugene! You really are the eviler one!"

"Hah!" Krabs chortled gruffly. "I ain't denyin' that I did a lot of rotten things over me unnaturally long life, Sheldon! But in me defense, I never tried t' take over the world and enslave everyone as mindless drones!"

"Touché." Plankton shrugged while shooting sweat like a sprinkler. "But I KNOW I'm the faster one! My strides may be tiny but I'm as fast as a mako shark!"

"Hah! Care t' put yer money where ye mouth is, pipsqueak?" Krabs challenged him with an eager grin.

"Try me, tubby!" Plankton retorted.

The Flying Dutchman blew his whistle. "That's what I like t' hear! The first one t' cover 50,000 miles can move on t' bench pressin'!" he pointed at a bunch of barbells with 15-foot-wide dumbbells on each side.

Squilliam paled and gulped in horror, while Krabs and Plankton gave each other challenging glares.

"Bet I can cover *100,000 miles* before you can!" the copepod said brashly.

"Not in this afterlife!" Krabs pointed himself, grinning widely. "I'll be pumpin' iron first!"

And so the two kept running, ecstatic at the thought of besting each other, while Squilliam cried like a baby and the Flying Dutchman's haunting laugh echoed through the room.

And at long last, I have finished this unplanned trilogy. What to call it? The "Finite Trilogy"? Don't know. I had a lot of this planned out (especially the epilogue) when I wrote "Finite" but it ended up being postponed for a while, with some things like Patrick's comically abrupt epiphany and Mrs. Puff getting the short end of the stick being last-minute additions. After this, I don't know if I'll write any more *SpongeBob SquarePants* stuff in the future, but I'll never say NEVER, as inspiration might come back to me someday, but for now, this is a satisfying conclusion to my *SpongeBob* fanwork, and should I ever come back to this, the fic will be set at some point in this vaguely defined two-decade time span (1999-2020).